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172-604

26 JAN 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: Executive Director-Comptroller

SUBJECT : Returnee Interviews -- Calendar Year 1971

1. The Inspection Staff interviewed 119 persons during 1971 on their return from overseas assignments. The group was smaller than in previous years but included a good balance of operational, support, and clerical personnel and was distributed among geographical areas and directorates as follows:

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Interviews were informal and followed no set list of questions. Nonetheless, all returnees were given an opportunity to talk about their experiences overseas, the Agency, and their relationship to it. Although we cannot develop any precise statistics from the recorded body of material, we can reflect some general as well as individual employee attitudes about the Agency and their careers in it.

2. Feelings about personal relationship to the Agency range between those held by two small groups at the positive and negative extremes, with an overwhelming majority well satisfied with being members of this organization. The small group at the extreme positive end of the scale seem to identify completely with the Agency, its mission, and especially with its work abroad. At the other extreme, a small number seem to be preoccupied with advancement and to feel the Agency does not provide an adequate career development system. But only a few among them either were or contemplated resigning, and two even said they could not imagine any other vocation. The great majority of the returnees are satisfied, conscientious careerists to whom the job feels right. This attitude is

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GROUP 1
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most evident in the professional support group but also exists among operations officers. Some of the non-professional group, including secretaries, information clerks, and operational support assistants, are stimulated by their field experience to want to work toward professional jobs.

3. There were no sharply new attitudes relative to Agency management and morale this year, but certain rather homely truths seemed to be given more solid expression or to appear more often. Essentially what seems to be surfacing, however explicit in the minds of our interviewees, is the importance to them of job satisfaction. Basically, this translates into having a job they believe is essential and in being productively occupied. This tying of morale directly to job satisfaction was expressed most often in positive terms by returnees who had, in their paraphrased words: worked harder than ever before; been fortunate in having had the most challenging job of his career; grown professionally; been stimulated; had a real job to do; had a feeling of accomplishment, which kept morale high; had a tour which was one of the best things that ever happened. In this regard, the Agency usually fares well in comparison with other organizations overseas, as illustrated in an unusual comment by one returnee to the effect that "our [redacted] man station is busy, morale is high, and it is the envy of the 75-man Embassy."

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4. In its negative aspect, expressed less often but still enough to note, returnees commented that underemployment in a station was bad for morale; that a new assignment which lacked challenge had led to retirement; that an officer whose job had been reduced to routine decisions had in effect retired in place; that morale had improved immensely with the withdrawal of a compulsory 48 hour week which had kept people in offices but idle. Some feeling was expressed by a few experienced personnel that operations had become less stimulating as the domestic and international scene had changed and as the organization had become more "professional," meaning, I believe, more settled in its activities.

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5. The problem of morale at isolated technical installations is a perennial one, and 1971 was no exception. Problems arose again in [redacted] and to a small extent in [redacted]. One officer noted that even under the best administration there is a tendency for cabin fever to develop where there is a lack of meaningful tasks. Our interviews showed that where morale had gone up at isolated sites, the manager had imbued the mission with a sense of importance and accomplishment. Where morale had gone down, management had denigrated the work, there was little feedback to indicate any positive results from the work, and management's professional approach to the mission had deteriorated. There were also complaints about personnel administration. Those who have been associated with isolated sites have emphasized constantly the importance of careful personnel selection in general and management expertise in particular. The need continues and is recognized.

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6. Several miscellaneous subjects were mentioned, each by a few returnees. I shall touch briefly upon a few. There were a couple of unfortunate medical incidents, but employees usually had adequate attention from the Agency or Embassy, or they had access to good facilities in nearby countries. Language problems were seldom raised this year. One remark was that training in Vietnamese is a waste of time, given the nature of the assignments. The second was that Persian training at Headquarters must be poor, since an officer was unable to speak this easy language after an intensive course. On the subject of careers, CI Staff was said to prevent personnel from rotating and thus broadening their capabilities. The DDP had had to intervene to permit a volunteer to go to Vietnam from an office where half of the incumbents had been retained for their entire careers. There is some concern that CA assignments, for other reasons, are a dead end to careers. Younger officers are said to struggle to avoid such assignments, and older CA careerists have found difficulty in obtaining other positions to broaden and advance their careers.

7. The administrative aspects of PCS actions and living abroad appear to have been handled well, since there were no significant comments or complaints. Similarly, the selection of personnel appears for the most part to have been sound.

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Acting Inspector General

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